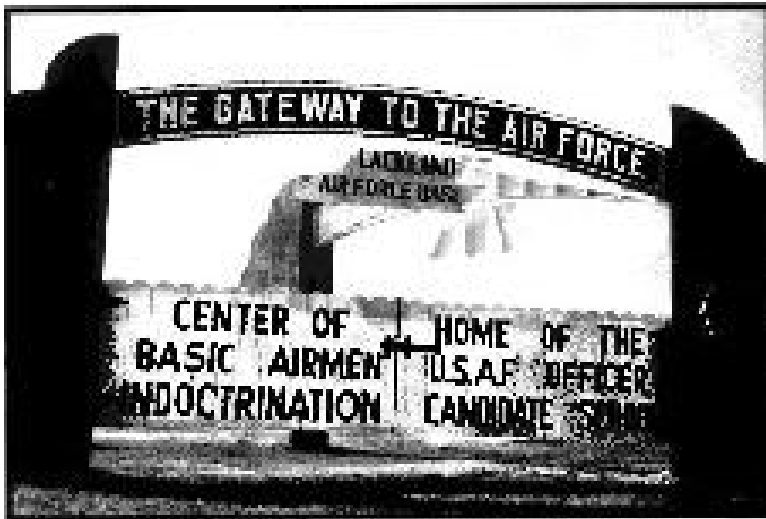


# Community History



Above: the community has a long relationship with the Air Force

### Introduction

The United Southwest Communities Planning area is characterized with rolling terrain surfaced by clay loam that supports mesquite, grasses, thorny brushes and cacti. The area is traversed by the Medina River, Medio Creek and Indian Creek.

The area has a long and varied history. From the days of Payaya Indian settlement, to exploration by Spanish colonists and finally to modern settlement, the area exhibits the influences of many different cultures. Development of the area is also influenced by the Air Force presence and the growth of Lackland Air Force Base.

Federal recognition of the Camino Real offers the opportunity to promote theme based heritage tourism in the area.

# United Southwest Communities Plan

## Early Settlement

Southwest Bexar County has much evidence of prehistoric settlement. Surficial lithic scatter sites are the most common prehistoric types in this region. Prehistoric sites are often located on up-land areas overlooking creeks and streams however they are also present in alluvial settings. These sites represent lithic resource procurement, food procurement and processing, and camp-sites.

Payaya Indians who lived in the areas between San Antonio and the Frio River likely inhabited the planning area. Spanish explorers first observed this group in 1690. The arrival of French explorer Sieur de La Salle in 1685 on the Texas soil prompted Spanish into claiming and colonizing the areas north of Mexico. The first Spanish mission, San Francisco del los Tejas, was established in east Texas in 1691. Also a governor was sent to establish more missions and forts in Texas.

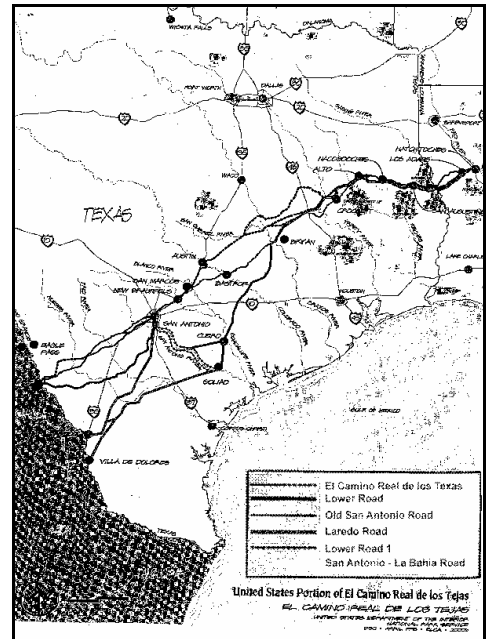
Domingo Terán de Los Ríos crossed the Medina River near present day Laredo Highway and headed northeast for a distance of five leagues to present day downtown San Antonio. The Governor described friendly encounters with the Payaya Indians in his diaries. The Mission San Antonio de Valero ("the Alamo") was established in 1718 to baptize Payayas in the area.

## Camino Real De Los Tejas

San Antonio, the provincial capital of Texas from 1772 to 1821, was linked to the Spanish empire by the Camino Real which extended more than 1,000 miles from Mexico City through Saltillo to San Antonio then north and east to Los Adeas, near present day Natchitoches, Louisiana. The Camino Real linked economically important towns, capitals and mines with Mexico City. Beginning as Indian trails from the earliest days of human activity in the Americas, these roads were used continuously over centuries and much later by the Spaniards and modern settlers. The roads were a supply line for the area by transporting supplies, missionaries and military protection.

In Texas the Camino Real, or El Camino Real De Los Tejas, is actually a series of trails with different routes used at different times depending upon seasons, risk of attack and other factors. These different routes began at San Juan Bautista, approximately 35 miles southeast of the location of modern day Eagle Pass, then spread out across South Texas and converged in San Antonio. These different routes included the Camino Pita, the Upper Presidio Road, the Lower Presidio Road and the Laredo Road. In Bexar County, each route can best be identified by the location of its crossing of the Medina River. The United Southwest Communities were historically spliced by segments of the Camino Real including the Pita Trail and the Upper Presidio Road.

The Pita Trail or "Camino Pita" ran northeast from Paso de Francia, passed Cotulla and Poteet and then east to San Antonio beginning in the late 1600s. This route crossed the Medina River southeast of the present day town of Macdona near Pearsall Road and may have continued to San Antonio following the general alignment of Pearsall Road and Frio City Road. By the mid 1700s this route had shifted further to the south because of conflicts with local Apache and Comanches. This more southerly route was used until the 1800s and was known as the Lower Presidio Road or the "Camino de en Medio." This route probably crossed the Medina River near present day Highway 16. Later an Upper Presidio Road followed the route of the earlier Camino Pita to the Frio River and then diverged to the Lower Presidio, crossing the Medina River near present day Somerset Road.



The colonization of Texas was dependent upon the maintenance of the Camino Real network of trails. Eighteenth century ranchers conducted cattle drives along the route from Texas to an annual fair in Saltillo, Coahuila. Also, the trails were used to transport supplies to the American Colonies during the War for Independence. The trails also spurred immigration, Moses Austin used the trail to reach San Antonio to request a land grant from the Spanish in 1820. In unpublished survey notes, Austin identified both the route of the Camino Pita and the location of where the trail crossed the Medina River.



*A tree blazed to mark the path of the Camino Real*

Samuel McCulloch was a free black soldier in the Texas Revolution; he fought at Goliad in 1835 where he was severely wounded in the right shoulder and became the first Texan casualty of the revolution. Prohibited by the laws of the day from owning property, McCulloch became eligible for a one-league land grant by an act of Texas Congress in 1837 that entitled persons permanently disabled in the service of Texas to one-league grants. McCulloch settled on land along Pearsall Road on the south bank of the Medina River fourteen miles southwest of San Antonio.



*A sign marks the 1861 Samuel McCulloch Cemetery*

# United Southwest Communities Plan



*Camp Kelly, 1917*



*Lackland postcard (undated)*



*Kelly postcard (undated)*

After the independence of Texas usage of the Camino Real decreased as new routes were established following modern settlement patterns. Ultimately the arrival of the railroad altered trade routes in Texas and the locations of future towns and developments.

## The Railroad Age

The Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio Railroad reached San Antonio in 1877 and in 1881 it was expanded westward through the United Southwest Communities to meet with the eastward-building Southern Pacific Railroad in 1883 just west of the Pecos River. This critical connection provided a new southern transcontinental route to California. Moreover, this development signaled the end of the stagecoach era and the beginning of the Industrial Age. The arrival of the railroad also hastened a population boom for Bexar County which grew from 16,043 in 1870 to 30,470 in 1880 and by 1900 San Antonio had grown to 53,321, making it the largest city in the State of Texas.

## Military City USA

The United Southwest Communities have been historically connected with the growth and expansion of the military presence in San Antonio. The United States established a military aviation force as World War I tested the nation's strength. In search of a new aviation training facility for the United States Army Signal Corps, Major Benjamin Foulois selected 700 acres of flat farmland with a water supply near the Missouri-Pacific railroad in southwest San Antonio in 1916. With the assistance of U.S. Senator Morris Sheppard, the site was acquired and cleared. Named for Lt. George Edward Maurice Kelly who perished in a fatal crash at Fort Sam Houston in 1911, flying activities began in on April 5, 1917, the day before the United States declared war on Germany. Kelly Field was one of 14 schools in the country conducting primary flight training during World War I. Kelly would become the nation's oldest continuously operating flying base.

Kelly Field became the premier training facility for aviators including Charles Lindbergh, Curtis LeMay and many future Air Force chiefs of staff. After World War I, the number of personnel at Kelly decreased and some facilities were closed. This was followed by a heated debate over whether or not the Air Service should function as an independent military branch and whether or not the Air Service should undertake bombardment operations independent of surface operations.

In 1939, with renewed crisis in Europe, Congress authorized \$300 million to rebuild the Army Air Corps. With that action, personnel at Kelly grew from 1,100 to more than 20,000. At the height of World War II more than 21,000 civilian war workers were employed at Kelly. About 40% of that workforce included "Kelly Katies," one of the largest female workforces at the time and San Antonio's unique version of "Rosie the Riveter."

By 1943 Kelly had become the largest maintenance and supply facility in the United States. The one-million square foot hangar at Kelly became the largest structure in the world without center columns. Kelly maintenance personnel played a major role in the Berlin Airlift, as Kelly was the only depot for repairing and overhauling engines used on Army Air Force cargo aircraft carrying food and supplies to Berlin.

In June 1942 a part of Kelly was separated to become the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center (SAACC). Training operations were relocated from Kelly, as it became a logistics facility for the B-29 and similar B-50, B-36, B-46, B-58, F-102, F-105 and the C-5. The SAACC provided classification and preflight training for airmen and by 1945 training was offered in the medical field, maintenance, and other sectors of the Air Force. In 1946 the fledgling base was renamed Lackland Army Air Field for Brigadier General Frank D. Lackland who was an early commander of Kelly Field that had championed the establishment of an aviation and cadet reception center.



*Lackland postcard (undated)*



*Lackland postcard (undated)*



*Lackland postcard (undated)*



## United Southwest Communities Plan



*Lackland in 1962*

In 1947 the Air Force was established as an independent military service and Kelly Field and Lackland Field became known as Kelly Air Force Base and Lackland Air Force Base respectively.

The Korean War tested Lackland's capacity to train new recruits and satisfy mobility demands. The training population in the 1950s soared to 55,000 despite capacity for only 25,000. A tent city was needed to accommodate the influx of new recruits. This led to construction of the 1,000 person steel and brick Recruit Housing and Training facilities for basic military training.

By 1950 San Antonio had the largest military establishment in the United States with approximately 50,000 military personnel present at local military bases. This helped create the name "Military City USA" which was often used to describe modern San Antonio. Kelly personnel provided strategic transport and maintenance support during the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, Desert Shield and Desert Storm.



*Lackland postcard (undated)*

After World War II, thousands of veterans who had been attracted to the area during their service years returned to San Antonio. As a percentage, this decade reflected the largest population growth, the city grew by 44 percent from 408,442 in 1950 to reach 587,718 in 1960. Subsequently the City grew 10 to 20 percent each decade.

The importance of the two bases continued through the Korean and Vietnam Wars. In 1956 an Air National Guard squadron was installed at Kelly at a cost over \$1 million. In 1957 the nine-story Wilford Hall medical center was completed and became the largest medical facility in the Air Force. Wilford Hall provides specialty and referral care services for both the military and the San Antonio community. In 1966, the Air Force acquired 3,500 acres from the Atomic Energy Commission.



*Wilford Hall postcard (undated)*

The Base Closure and Realignment Commission ("BRAC") terminated Kelly's mission in 1993. In 1996 the City of San Antonio created the Greater Kelly Development Authority (GKDA) as a non-profit operating authority charged with managing the reuse of the Base. The Base officially closed on July 13, 2001. GKDA has goals to have 21,000 jobs at Kelly by 2006.

In 2004, the overall population of Lackland Air Force Base was between 35,000 and 36,000, not including those stationed at Lackland for basic training. As the result of the events of September 11, 2001 a number of upgrades have been planned at Lackland. Wilford Hall is receiving a series of "life safety upgrades" between 2004 and 2008 and new dormitories are planned at the main base. Projects at the Lackland Annex include additional dormitories, a fitness center, a dining hall and a child care center. An additional \$4.2 million Joint Advanced Language Training Center is due for completion in September 2004. These new investments at the base will help secure its mission and contribute to the quality of life of residents in the United Southwest Communities.

### Suburban Neighborhood Development

The National Housing Act of 1934 created the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to revive the private home financing system and stimulate private investment in housing during the Great Depression. In 1936, FHA published *Planning Neighborhoods for Small Houses* that set subdivision standards designed to promote livable neighborhoods and stabilize lending conditions to justify mortgage lending and FHA mortgage insurance. FHA's "conditional commitment" policy provided that if plans for land and housing development met FHA's underwriting standards, a conditional commitment could be made to an approved lender that FHA would insure all of the home mortgages so long as the eventual borrowers were properly qualified. The FHA's policies encouraged the development of large-scale home building operations in which development was financed and constructed by a single entity who would arrange for the purchase of land, the design of the subdivision plat, and the design and construction of individual homes. FHA's subdivision policies were intended to help developers secure private financing and facilitate the availability of low cost mortgages for homebuyers.

The FHA policies established minimum standards for home construction that quickly became industry standards. These included minimum requirements for lot size, setback from the street, separation from adjacent structures, and house width. These policies popularized suburban ranch style construction and ended the historic row house development pattern of older American cities.



A Levittown Family

## United Southwest Communities Plan

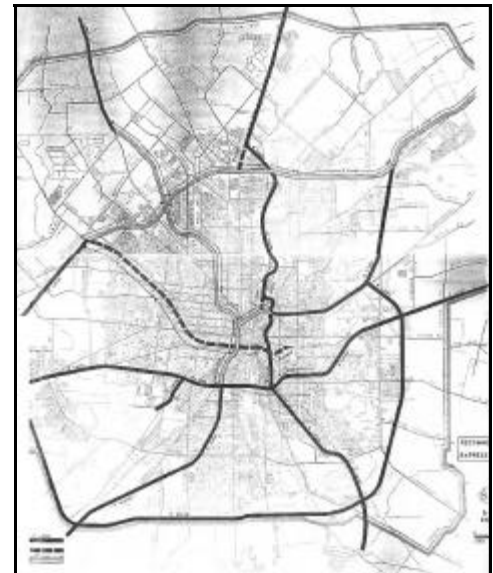
One policy that was promoted by FHA was a curvilinear street layout to protect privacy, provide visual interest, adapt to topography and eliminate four way intersections. The curvilinear layouts recommended by FHA in the 1930s set the standard for generations of subdivisions that were built after World War II. Because of FHA's review of subdivision design for mortgage approval, curvilinear subdivision design became the standard of real estate and local planning practices. Many localities adopted subdivision ordinances based on the FHA standard, in effect making this the legally required form of new residential development.

FHA began an unprecedented housing program to assist returning servicemen after World War II. In 1944 the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, often referred to as "the GI Bill" authorized the Veteran's Administration to provide loan guarantees for veterans. The new terms allowed veterans to use their "GI" benefit in place of cash, thereby eliminating the down payment on a new house. In 1946 the Veteran's Emergency Housing Act authorized Federal Assistance in housing returning veterans and extends FHA authority to insure mortgages. The Housing Act of 1948 liberalized FHA mortgage terms to allow insurance on up to 95 percent of a home's value and loan payment periods extending as much as 30 years. The 1948 Act also encouraged the use of cost-reduction techniques through large-scale site construction strategies.

### Characteristics of Postwar Suburbs

In Kenneth T. Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier* five characteristics of post-war suburbs are outlined, these include:

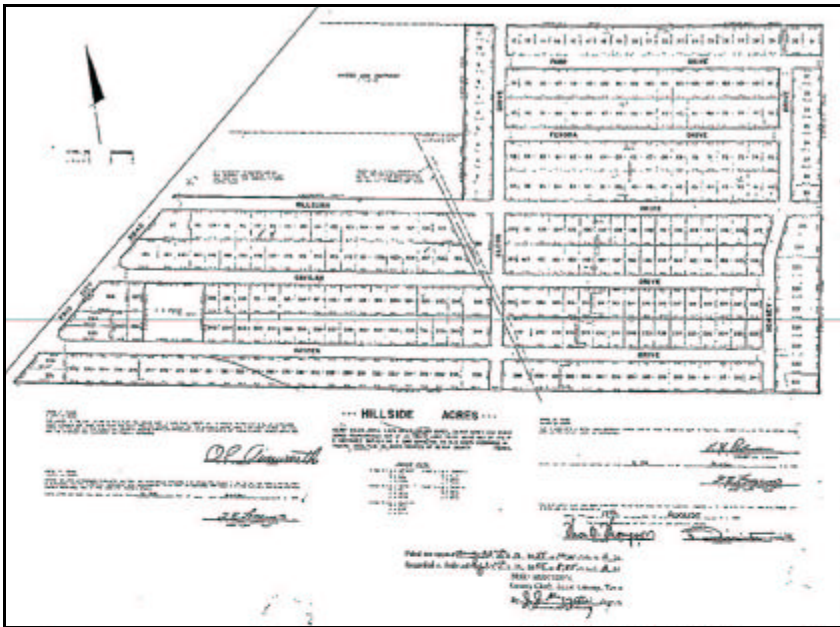
1. Peripheral location – mass production construction techniques needed large areas of land
2. Low density – typical lot sizes ranged from 40 by 100 feet to 80 by 100 feet and subdivisions allotted a high portion of their total land area to streets and open spaces and were designed around the automobile.
3. Architectural similarity – to simplify construction methods and reduce design fees most of the large developers offered no more than six basic house plans.
4. Easy availability – this period is perhaps most well known for the reduction of the threshold of purchase. Government financing, mass production techniques, high wages and low interest rates made new housing affordable to millions of Americans.
5. Economic and racial homogeneity – the post war developments took place against a background of the decline of factory-dominated cities and developed a physical separation from perceived problems in urban areas.



1957 San Antonio Freeway Plan

By 1950 the City had grown to a population of 408,442. Much of the San Antonio area suburban development followed expressways built under the Interstate Highway Program. A 1957 plan for San Antonio freeways showed Loop 410 in the United Southwest communities and these sections opened by 1964, completing the 51.6 mile Loop around City.





1955 subdivision plat for Hillside Acres

The first modern subdivision in the United Southwest Communities was Hillside Acres, platted in 1955. This neighborhood was originally developed by Darwood Williams and featured a rectangular block scheme to facilitate quick sale of residential lots. Constructed without modern utilities, the residents of this subdivision pressed the City of San Antonio for inclusion in the City Water Service System. Patrick Semmelsburger, a Hillside Acres resident, lead this initiative and created a legal fund to press suit against the city.

Valley Hi, opened in 1958, was the first large Ray Ellison neighborhood in the United Southwest Communities. Prices were kept low through large land purchases, volume building and array of operations maintained by the Company. Without municipal water service available, Ray Ellison founded the Lackland City Water Company, which at the time was the largest privately owned utility in Texas. To further expedite his businesses, Ellison also developed interests in land development, lumber, banking, component manufacturing, real estate, title, and mortgage lending.

# VALLEY-HI

*America's Third Largest Planned Community*

SAUTES THE MERCHANTS OF SAN ANTONIO, WHO HAVE DONE SO MUCH TO BRING OUR CITY TO THE HIGH LEVEL OF ECONOMY IT NOW ENJOYS . . . WHO HAVE HAD A HAND IN SHAPING ITS DESTINY . . . AND WHOSE FUTURE PLANS ENVISION A SAN ANTONIO RANKING WITH THE HIGHEST AS A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE!

**NO DOWN PAYMENT TO VETERANS • LOWEST FHA TERMS**

#### VALLEY-HI:

- 4 minutes to **WELLS FARGO**
- 2 minutes to **LACKLAND AFB**
- 2 minutes to **AN HOSPITAL**
- 3 minutes to **SECURITY SERVICE**

and 18 minutes to downtown San Antonio via high-speed expressways

Valley-Hi, with over 1800 acres of rolling woodland for an estimated 12,000 modern homes, already boasts more fine services and facilities than any area its size. Churches of many faiths, schools for all ages—including Catholic parochial—recreational parks, a huge outdoor shopping city, an Olympic-type swim club, ball diamonds, parks and recreation areas are just a few of the many reasons it's great to live in Valley-Hi. Over 80 custom designs will insure your finding the home you want, and many are now ready for occupancy. Paved roads are open daily and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

VALLEY-HI homes are priced from \$19,000 to \$19,000 with monthly payments from \$48 to \$166

VALLEY-HI NORTH homes are from \$24,000 to \$25,000 with monthly payments from \$108 to \$155

## VALLEY-HI

AH EXCLUSIVE RAY BUNDICK DEVELOPMENT

088-0111 Sales

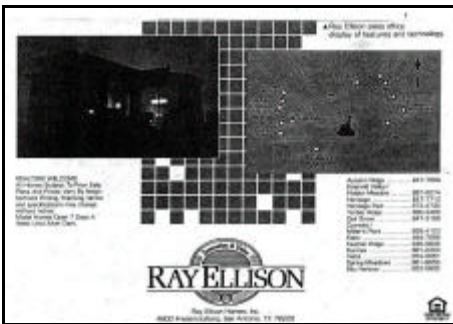
084-0111 Plans

For Information and Free Brochure Write:  
 Valley-Hi Development, Ltd., Box 1000, Dallas, Texas 75201

1963 advertisement

# United Southwest Communities Plan

Ellison's neighborhoods generally featured ten different floor plans with three different elevations available, thus there are up to 30 different house types in a given subdivision. The sizes of cabinets and doors and other features are standardized throughout to keep costs low. Ellison introduced slab construction techniques and standardization of trusses and other construction features. Other builders soon emulated Ellison's cost saving techniques.



1985 Ray Ellison advertisement showing Sky Harbour

By 1983 Ellison had built 30,000 homes in San Antonio and it was estimated that one out of ten San Antonians lived in an Ellison-built home. In 1984 Ellison was credited with being the nation's dominant builder within a single city with 45% of the San Antonio market's housing starts that year.

By the 1980s many of the homes in the United Southwest Communities were abandoned, foreclosed and left vacant. Deterioration of the neighborhood led to vandalism, property value decreases and even violent crime.

## Renaissance of the Area

The City of San Antonio used Land and Water Conservation Fund grants and Revenue Sharing funds to develop Miller's Pond Community Park beginning in 1980. Initial improvements consisted of site work, an entrance road and parking area, a pavilion, rest room facilities, 15 picnic units, a playground area and installation of lighting, irrigation and landscaping.



Johnston Library

Another public facility completed around this time is the Johnston Branch Library, which opened in 1981 on land donated by Ray Ellison Industries. The library is dedicated to the memory of Leah Carter Johnston, the first Children's Librarian of the San Antonio Public Library. In 1927 Johnston created "Young Pegasus" the first children's poetry contest in the United States.

In 1982 People Active in Community Effort ("PACE") was organized by a small group of concerned citizens. At that time the primary issues the group tackled were the landfill, illegal dumping and education issues with the South San Antonio school board.

To encourage area residents to clean up their properties, PACE began awarding certificates of appreciation and placed signs on the lawns of the month in the neighborhoods during the 1980s.

In 1984 the Southwest Community Association (SWCA) registered and certified with the Texas Secretary of State. Focused on restoring pride to the community, major SWCA accomplishments have included a successful petition for VIA bus service in the area, graffiti wipeouts, tree plantings, other initiatives to create visible differences in the area. A unique initiative undertaken by this group was to install free smoke detectors in area homes in conjunction with the Fire Department and other sponsors. Other initiatives have addressed crime patrols, fire safety and stray animals.

PACE and the SWCA worked with the City to establish an 8,000 square foot Community Center at Miller's Pond in 1987 using CDBG funds. A gift from the Charity Ball Association funded the purchase of children's playground equipment in 1988 and additional park improvements were completed in 1990 using CDBG funds to provide playing fields, additional picnic facilities and security lighting.

The actions of PACE contributed to the City's decision to close the Nelson Gardens municipal landfill in 1993. To deal with waste-management crisis, the City began a huge expansion of recycling services into what is now the largest curb-side recycling program in Texas. Moreover, the City now harnesses methane gases from Nelson Gardens for use by City Public Service for conversion to electricity. With the City out of the landfill business, the City now hauls its waste to private facilities operated by Browning Ferris Industries and Waste Management of Texas. With permission of the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission, Waste Management began expansion of the Covell Gardens Recycling and Disposal Facility from 176 acres to 478 acres in 1998. That action will extend the life of that landfill to accept the City's waste for an additional 25 years.



*Nelson Gardens Landfill*



*Millers Pond Community Center*

## United Southwest Communities Plan

Between 1990 and 2000 the United Southwest Communities had grown a remarkable 15.9% increasing the population from 27,641 to 32,032 while the number of vacant housing units dropped 66% from 1,580 to 535. Both of these are indicators of community prosperity and renewed interest in the area. Other positive indicators for the area were an increase in the percentage of owner occupied housing units and a decrease in the poverty rate—according to the US Census.

In 1994, a task force was created to address the deterioration of the Indian Creek Neighborhood. Leveraging CDBG funds, the City invested approximately \$1 million to rehabilitate 42 homes. In turn property values increased approximately 14 percent and new commercial activity has begun to revitalize the Pearsall Road corridor.

Also in 1994 construction began on an expansion of the Johnston Library, to enlarge it from 9,000 square feet to 12,000 square feet and to rehabilitate the interior. This ambitious effort was completed in 1996 at a total cost of \$785,470.

In 1998 Southwest Community Association submitted a proposal to the City of San Antonio for a hike and bike nature trail along the former 3-mile Lackland Rail Spur. The City included this acquisition in the 1999 bond program.

In the mean time, the Hillside Acres Good Neighbors forged ahead with drainage and street improvements and plans for a community garden which was included in the 2003 bond program.

Since 2001 there has been considerable new residential development has come to the United Southwest Communities. In 2004 new subdivisions were under development by Eagle Valley homes, Choice Homes, KB Homes and Fieldstone Communities. Some growing pains have accompanied this new growth as area schools have become more crowded and area roadways have received higher volumes of traffic.

### Epilogue

In October 2004 Congress and President Bush designated El Camino Real de los Tejas as a National Historic Trail. The trail will be administered through the National Trail System program of the National Park System. The measure was sponsored by Representative Ciro Rodriguez (D-San Antonio) and Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson (R-Texas). Though much of the original route traverses private properties, the accessible portions of the corridor will be marketed for heritage tourism. The Alamo Area Council of Governments (AACOG) is spearheading the local effort to promote the Camino Real.